

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L OTTAWA 1091

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CA

SUBJ: REASONS FOR OUELLET RESIGNATION IN JUDGES' AFFAIR

1. REASONS FOR MIN CONSUMER AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS OUELLET RESIGNATION (FROM CABINET ONLY, NOT FROM HIS COMMONS SEAT) NOW BECOMING MORE CLEAR. AT LIBERAL PARTY CAUCUS EVENING BEFORE OUELLET RESIGNATION, SOME SIX TO TEN LIBERAL BACKBENCHERS EXPRESSED THEIR DISPLEASURE OVER GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF WHAT IS BECOMING KNOWN AS "THE AFFAIR OF THE JUDGES," PARTICULARLY TRUDEAU'S REFUSAL TO ACCEPT DRURY RESIGNATION. SOME DISSIDENTS APPARENTLY EXPRESSED INTENTION OF NOT VOTING WITH THE GOVERNMENT ON NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY SPONSORED NON-CONFIDENCE VOTE (WHICH LATER VOTED DOWN MARCH 16 BY 128 TO 102 VOTES). LIBERAL MP MARK MACGUIGAN TALKED TO PRESS ABOUT THIS DISSATISFACTION AS DID HIS COLLEAGUES LLOYD FRANCIS AND JIM FLEMING. OUELLET RESIGNATION, THUS, THE PRICE TRUDEAU AND LIBERAL LEADERS HAD TO PAY TO SATISFY THIS LIBERAL CAUCUS DISSENT AND OUELLET THROWN (OR JUMPED, SINCE IMPETUS NOT CLEAR) TO THE WOLVES. ADDED REASON PRESUMABLY THAT OUELLET RESIGNATION MIGHT TEND TO NEUTRALIZE OPPOSITION ATTACK.

2. THE RESIGNATION DID SATISFY LIBERAL BACKBENCHERS NONE OF WHOM ABSTAINED OR VOTED AGAINST THE GOVT ON THE NON-CONFIDENCE MOTION. AND DISSIDENTS APPARENTLY ARE NOT PUSHING GOVT TO CAVE IN TO OPPOSITION DEMANDS FOR DRURY RESIGNATION OR A PUBLIC INQUIRY. BUT THERE NO SIGN THAT

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OPPOSITION WILL BE SATISFIED WITH OUELLET SACRIFICE AND

THEY LIKELY TO USE THE RESIGNATION AS EVIDENCE OF NEED
FOR PUBLIC INQUIRY TO GET ALL FACTS OUT.

3. COMMENT: LIBERAL PARY HAS 139 SEATS IN HOUSE TO
TOTAL OF 124 FOR COMBINED OPPOSITION, OSTENSIBLY A COM-
FORTABLE MARGIN GIVEN THE OPERATION UNDER NORMAL CONDITIONS
OF STRICT PARTY DISCIPLINE. BUT A SWING OF EIGHT OR TEN
VOTES COULD BRING DOWN THE GOVERNMENT. THIS RESULT WAS AND
STILL IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY. LIBERAL DISSIDENTS IN CURRENT
MATTER WERE WILLING TO ABSTAIN BUT NOT TO JOIN OPPOSITION.
BUT THIS MINI-BACKBENCH REVOLT IS HIGHLY UNUSUAL FOR
LIBERALS WHO HAVE GREAT CAPACITY FOR KEEPING ANY SIGNIFICANT
DIFFERENCES TO THEMSELVES AND BROKERING THEM OUT
WITHIN CAUCUS. IN THIS SENSE, IT WAS A REMINDER TO
TRUDEAU THAT THE NORMAL OMNIPOTENCE OF A CANADIAN
PRIME MINISTER WHO POSSESSES A SOLID PARLIAMENTARY
MAJORITY IS SUBJECT TO THE CONSTRAINT OF AVOIDING
POSITIONS ON MATTERS OF MAJOR SIGNIFICANCE WHICH WILL
COST HIM SUPPORT FROM WITHIN HIS PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS.
LEARY

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